



recycle  
across  
america®  
let's recycle right!®

The society-wide standardized labels for recycling bins are referred to as

**"... one of the most important  
environmental fixes taking root today."**

**The New York Times**

The society-wide standardized labels  
for recycling bins are deemed ...

**"A World Changing Solution"**

by Ashoka



Recycling and the society-wide standardized labels  
for recycling bins are listed as

**"... one of the top ten solutions  
to reverse climate change"**

Katharine Wilkinson, Co-Author Drawdown

**RealLeaders**

The society-wide standardized labels for recycling bins are part of:

**Historic U.S. Bill to Clean Up  
Recycling at the Bin  
and Save Billions**

**Forbes**

*"With the support of Recycle Across America, we can help our visitors recycle better by implementing standardized labeling on recycling containers, and in turn help protect these parks unimpaired for future generations."*

*Shawn Norton – Chief Sustainability Operations, U.S. National Park Service*

## OPEN LETTER TO THE ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE HOSTING THE U.S. RECYCLING HEARING ON JUNE 30, 2022

June 29, 2022

Dear Chairman Tonko and Congressman McKinley,

With this letter, we are formally requesting the Energy and Commerce Committee to expedite federal legislation and expedite the national implementation of the society-wide standardized labels for recycling and compost bins to help the public recycle and compost properly, everywhere.

*The society-wide standardized labels for recycling and compost bins have already been developed for every type of recycling and composting program, and for every type of sorting system in the U.S. (including battery recycling).*

*With more than nine million society-wide standardized labels currently displayed on recycling and compost bins across the country, and with more than a decade's worth of compiled metrics and testimonials of efficacy, the society-wide standardized labels for bins have proven to be the most common-sense, effective, immediate, systemic, and low-cost way to increase recycling levels, eliminate costly contamination, improve the quality of recycled materials, and enable recycled commodity markets to thrive.*

*Because the society-wide standardized label solution for recycling and compost bins has already been created, tested, and proven, the national implementation can be accomplished without straining taxpayers.*

*As described in this Forbes article titled 'Historic U.S. Bill to Clean Up Recycling At The Bin and Save Billions', this commonsense solution can save taxpayers billions of dollars and increase jobs, while measurably reducing climate change and significantly reducing the amount of waste going into oceans and waterways.*

The standardized labels are currently displayed on recycling and compost bins in every application imaginable, including (federal, state, county, and local) government locations, including nearly 100 National Parks, National Forests, and National Monuments, as well as, international airports, municipal facilities and sites, more than 9,000 schools and universities, corporations, businesses, sports stadiums, hospitals, restaurants, hotels, single-family residences, multi-family housing units, drop-off recycling centers, etc.

Additionally, the standardized labels are part of a statewide rollout in Rhode Island, where we have tested a comprehensive, easy, and effective large-scale implementation strategy – as well as measurement tactics to quantify the efficacy of the labels.

When implemented, the society-wide standardized labels for bins have been shown to resolve the fundamental issue of contamination in the recycling stream *at the source*. A clear, photo-centric, and *society-wide* standardized labeling system for bins has proven to help end the public's confusion about how to recycle properly wherever they are, which, in turn, eliminates the costly contamination that has crippled the economics of recycling and caused the collapse of recycling at large.

As listed below, implementing the society-wide standardized labels for recycling and composted bins has been mentioned in nearly every recycling bill presented; which reaffirms why this common-sense and proven solution should be enacted, post haste. Here are a few bills where standardizing labels on bins and consistent national communication is included:

H.R. 8059, the “Recycling and Composting Accountability Act”

H.R. 8183, the “Recycling Infrastructure and Accessibility Act of 2022”

[H.R.2238.IH](#) — Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act of 2021 - 117th Congress (2021-2022)

[H.R.3684.EAS](#) — Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act - 117th Congress (2021-2022)

[H.R.1512.IH](#) — CLEAN Future Act - 117th Congress (2021-2022)

[H.R.2060.IH](#) — Federal Building Clean Jobs Act of 2021 - 117th Congress (2021-2022)

[S.1918.IS](#) — Battery and Critical Mineral Recycling Act of 2021 - 117th Congress (2021-2022)

Appropriations Sub Committee passed a bill requesting the EPA and the Department of the Interior to begin implementing the society-wide standardized labels for recycling bins (2019-2020)  
Recycle Act (2019-2020)

### **EASY AND QUICK NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF STANDARDIZED LABELS ON BINS**

To aid in the implementation, we have created and tested a national implementation strategy for this solution, which is low-cost and makes this solution easy and quick to put into action. Since the labels are already created, tested, and adopted in some of the most high-profile locations in the U.S., and the path to implementing the solution requires very little effort, there is no reason to wait.

### **FOLLOWING THE LEGISLATION MODEL AND LOGIC OF STANDARD ROAD SIGNAGE**

The rationale behind the society-wide standardized label solution for recycling and compost bins follows the same logic as the standardized road signage used across the nation (managed by the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices - MUTCD), which makes it possible for the public to drive properly wherever they are. Implementation of standardized labels for recycling and compost bins would logically result in a similar, societal success for recycling, simultaneously reducing factors that impact climate change and decreasing the amount of waste going into oceans. *Standardized labels for bins have proven to be the most effective, immediate, common-sense, and low-cost solution available today to resolve the recycling and waste-in-oceans crisis. Therefore, we implore you to expedite federal legislation to implement the society-wide standardized labels for recycling and composting receptacles, posthaste.*

**NOTE:** The implementation of society-wide standardized labels for recycling bins need not wait for the issue of labeling on packaging to be addressed. Metrics submitted over more than a decade have

consistently shown the use of standardized labels on recycling bins is highly effective regardless of the recycling information provided on the packaging. However, putting an end to the confusing and often misleading information on packaging should be addressed, to help consumers begin to identify and choose 'verified' recyclable packaging and packaging that is made from recycled materials.

### **THE EXTREME GLOBAL CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC CONFUSION ABOUT RECYCLING**

The historically inconsistent and ineffective messaging at receptacles has caused the public to make mistakes at the bin and created an overall sense of apathy and skepticism about recycling in general. Subsequently, recycling and compost systems have been plagued with millions of tons of garbage, making the processing of recyclables too costly and unreliable to compete with virgin materials. Contamination also degrades the quality of (and the demand for) recycled and composted commodities. In the end, the unwanted recyclables are either sent to the landfill, burned in an incinerator, or all too often, end up in oceans and waterways.

Until we begin to successfully reduce the use of virgin materials and enact *truly effective* reuse and recycling policies at scale, climate change will continue to worsen exponentially due to increased deforestation for paper products, extraction of fossil fuel for virgin plastic production, and mining of other finite resources. Likewise, the waste-in-oceans crisis will continue to intensify. For example, since China's National Sword Policy went into effect in January 2018 ending their imports of recyclables from the U.S. and other countries due to the contamination issue, the amount of daily waste going into oceans has been reported to have [increased by 27% \(Reuters\)](#) - resulting in more than 61,000,000 pounds of waste going into oceans each day.

### **CONCLUSION**

We realize that many tools need to be implemented if we are to solve the waste crisis, reduce climate change, and prevent waste from entering the oceans; every tool should be sharpened and used to address these critical issues. It is imperative, however, that while other tools are being developed, policy leaders begin to place immediate attention on the lowest-hanging fruit and implement the proven tools that are already available. There is absolutely no reason why a practical, easy, and low-to-no-cost solution, especially one as impactful and proven as the society-wide standardized labeling system for recycling bins, should be delayed any longer.

Please let us know when we can schedule a meeting with you and/or your staff to discuss this critical and time-sensitive solution.

Respectfully,

Mitch Hedlund  
Founder and Executive Director, Recycle Across the World  
[mitch@recycleacrossamerica.org](mailto:mitch@recycleacrossamerica.org)

Nina Van Toulon  
Co-Founder and Co-Coordinator, International Waste Platform  
[nina@indonesianwaste.org](mailto:nina@indonesianwaste.org)

The collage below demonstrates just a few examples of how chaotic recycling and composting labels on bins look, *everywhere*. Often labels look entirely different from one bin to the next, even within the same area, building, and throughout one community. Therefore, you can understand how people often make mistakes or don't take recycling seriously; and why garbage thrown in bins (aka contamination) is such an issue, crippling the viability of recycling around the world.

